

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3958

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 5021

EXDIS

FOR EA AMBASSADOR SULLIVAN

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, RP, US

SUBJECT: LET THE EAGLE SPEAK

1. I THINK THE TIME HAS COME TO TELL OFF FOREIGN SECRETARY ROMULO, PRIVATELY OF COURSE BUT FIRMLY. THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OVER WHICH HE PRESIDES HAS TWICE IN ONE WEEK REGISTERED FORMAL PROTESTS AGAINST THE UNITED STATES IN A MANNER MORE CHARACTERISTIC OF RELATIONS BETWEEN HOSTILE STATES THAN BETWEEN ALLIES ABOUT TO NEGOTIATE CONCERNING IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF THEIR MUTUAL SECURITY.

2. ON APRIL 5, AFTER A PROTRACTED MEDIA BUILDUP PARTIALLY FUELED BY DFA LEAKS, THE EMBASSY WAS ADVISED THAT THE EXEQUATUR OF VICE CONSUL NESS HAD BEEN WITHDRAWN WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT. AND ON APRIL 9 THE EMBASSY RECEIVED A STIFF NOTE FROM DFA ABOUT SECURITY SEARCH PROCEDURES AT SUBIC NAVAL BASE. IN BOTH INSTANCES, DFA ACCOMPANIED ITS NOTIFICATION TO US WITH A COLORFUL RELEASE TO THE PRESS; IN NEITHER CASE WERE WE GIVEN ADVANCE WARNING OR ANY OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND QUIETLY; IN BOTH INSTANCES MEDIA TREATMENT WAS DRAMATIC AND DELETERIOUS TO THE U.S. IMAGE.

3. WE OF COURSE ARE NOT ENTIRELY IN THE RIGHT SUBSTANTIVELY. IN THE NESS CASE, THE VISA SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ISSUED, AND ITS HAVING BEEN CANCELLED, NESS SHOULD NOT HAVE SOUGHT TO

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ESCORT THE OUTRAGED APPLICANT OUT OF THE OFFICE BY HER ARM.

IN THE SUBIC CASE, THERE WERE IRREGULARITIES IN THE SEARCH, AND THE PROCEDURES, ALTHOUGH OF LONG STANDING, WERE POLITICALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY INSENSITIVE. NONETHELESS, IN BOTH CASES DFA COULD HAVE GIVEN US INFORMAL NOTICE AND AN OPPORTUNITY TO TRANSFER NESS QUIETLY, TO MAKE AMENDS TO THE CLERKS AT SUBIC AND TO DEVISE BETTER SECURITY PROCEDURES. AS IT WAS, HOWEVER, DFA GUIDED THE MEDIA TO THE FEAST AND WHETTED THEIR APPETITE AND THAT OF THE PUBLIC FOR MORE.

4. WE ARE A TETHERED EAGLE IN THE PHILIPPINES--CONSPICUOUS AND VULNERABLE. OUR CONSTRAINTS ARE PARTLY OUR OWN. FOR THE AMERICAN SITUATION HERE IS TOO COMPLEX, EMOTIONALLY LOADED AND HISTORICALLY ROOTED TO ESCAPE CHRONIC CRITICISM. BUT THE CURRENT GOP DECISION TO POKE HARD AT US IN THE PUBLIC ARENA IS A POLICY CHOICE, NOT UNRELATED TO BASE NEGOTIATIONS. AS SUCH, THAT DECISION NEEDS TO BE MET AT THE POLICY LEVEL, AND PROMPTLY, WITH A CLEAR REJOINDER. OTHERWISE, HONORING PHILIPPINE NEGOTIATORS AT THE WHITE HOUSE AND IN THE DEPARTMENT WHILE THEIR COMPATRIOTS DENIGRATE THE AMERICAN PRESENCE IN THE PHILIPPINES, STRENGTHENS AN IMPRESSION THAT THE AMERICAN EAGLE IS A BIRD THAT RESPONDS FAVORABLY TO PUBLIC ABUSE AND TAIL FEATHER TWEAKING.

5. SO, LET'S TALK TO ROMULO, NOT THAT HE IS A PRINCIPAL OFFENDER BUT BECAUSE HE IS A WELL PLACED, READILY AVAILABLE AN PERHAPS NOT UNWILLING MEDIUM TO CONVEY A MESSAGE OF MODERATION TO MANILA.
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